

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-06

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INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 1245

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PN CO

SUBJECT: PANAMA CANAL NEGOTIATIONS AND THE URRUTIA-THOMSON
TREATY

REF: STATE 24299

1. REFTEL IS NOT AT ALL COMFORTING. FIRST OF ALL,
I AM AMAZED AND NON-PLUSSED THAT THE DEPUTY US
TREATY NEGOTIATOR WOULD HAVE, IN A CONVERSATION
LAST OCTOBER, HIMSELF RAISED THIS DELICATE POINT,
APPARENTLY (IF I READ REFTEL CORRECTLY) INTENDING
SENATOR BALCAZAR TO INFORM PRESIDENT LOPEZ, AND HAVING
LEARNED THAT THE SENATOR WOULD IN FACT RAISE IT WITH
THE PRESIDENT, STILL DID NOT SEE FIT TO INFORM THIS
EMBASSY OF A MATTER HIGHLY RELEVANT TO OUR RELATIONS
WITH COLOMBIA. HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THE PRESIDENT'S
COMMENTS TO AMBASSADOR MAILLIARD AND MYSELF WE WOULD
NEVER HAVE LEARNED OF THIS EXCHANGE.
THERE WAS IN MY VIEW AN OBLIGATION TO INFORM
US OF THINGS AS SENSITIVE AS CONVEYING MESSAGES
TO THE COLOMBIAN PRESIDENT. MOREOVER, THE END
RESULT OF THIS DIPLOMATIC EFFORT HAS BEEN CONFUSION.

2. I AGREE THAT BALCAZAR (AND I BELIEVE PRESIDENT
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LOPEZ) CERTAINLY ACTED IN GOOD FAITH; I AM NOT SURE

ONE CAN CATEGORICALLY STATE HE "CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD" THE MESSAGE. IN ANY CASE, WHATEVER HAPPENED, THE FACT IS THAT THE GOC DOES NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT WE INTEND TO DO ABOUT THIS MATTER.

3. ALL OF WHICH BRINGS ME TO MY SECOND POINT REGARDING CONSULTATION. THERE IS NO QUESTION BUT THAT WE MUST CONSULT. AS I NOTED, THE SECRETARY IS PERSONALLY COMMITTED TO THAT. THE QUESTION IS WHAT DO WE UNDERSTAND "CONSULT" TO MEAN. IF THERE IS ANY THOUGHT THAT WE WILL DECIDE WHAT TO DO AND THEN INFORM THE GOC AND CONSIDER THAT CONSULTATION (A PRACTICE THE BUREAUCRACY IS OFTEN WONT TO FOLLOW IN THE NAME OF CONSULTING, AS THE DEPARTMENT KNOWS), IT DOES NOT SEEM TO ME THAT THIS WILL DO. THERE IS AN OBLIGATION TO HEAR THE COLOMBIAN CASE, TO EXPLAIN OUR VIEWS AND PROBLEMS, AND TO GET THEIR REACTION SO THAT WE CAN JUDGE WHAT OUR FINAL POSITION MUST BE. CERTAINLY THAT IS WHAT THE COLOMBIANS UNDERSTAND THE SECRETARY'S PROMISE TO MEAN.

4. PARA 3 OF REFTTEL IS DISTINCTLY DISTURBING IN THIS REGARD. IT IMPLIED WE WILL WRAP THIS UP IN LAST-MINUTE BARGAINING. WHEN WE WOULD CONSULT IS UNCLEAR, BUT THE IMPLICATION IS STRONG THAT WE WOULD ACT AND THEN SIMPLY TELL THE COLOMBIANS. AND IF WE ARE NOT SUCCESSFUL IN GETTING "TRADE-OFFS" OR PERSUADING THE PANAMANIANIANS TO BE "HELPFUL", WHAT HAPPENS THEN TO OUR TREATY OBLIGATION TOWARD COLOMBIA? DO WE SIMPLY SAY TO THE COLOMBIANS, "SORRY, WE TRIED"?

5. I HAVE NEVER RECEIVED A CLEAR-CUT STATEMENT OF WHAT THE USG THINKS ABOUT THE SUBSTANCE AS DISTINCT FROM THE TACTICS OF THE PROBLEM, WHAT OUR GOALS AND OBJECTIVES WITH REGARD TO THE URRUTIA-THOMSON TREATY ARE, AND HOW WE PROPOSE TO ACHIEVE THEM. I WOULD APPRECIATE SUCH A CLEAR STATEMENT OF OUR SUBSTANTIVE POSITION.
VAKY

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